

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 582

By Staples

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Iyalode Nkechi Kianga Ajanaku of Knoxville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Iyalode Nkechi Kianga Ajanaku; and

WHEREAS, Nkechi Ajanaku was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for her fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, born December 22, 1956, in Gary, Indiana, Ms. Ajanaku was the beloved daughter of Dorothy Mae English and Sylvester Pew; and

WHEREAS, a member of Roosevelt High School's graduating class of 1975, Nkechi Ajanaku was an avid reader and by the age of sixteen had dedicated herself to studying in the Moorish Science Temple; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Ajanaku earned her associate degree from Pellissippi State Community College; after meeting her now-late husband, Muga Ajanaku, in Detroit, Michigan, the couple relocated to Memphis; in 1988, she, along with her four young children, relocated to Knoxville, where she married Umoja Abdul-Ahad one year later; and

WHEREAS, for more than thirty-five years, her activism and community service have touched many lives in the Knoxville area. Ms. Ajanaku's vision was to cultivate and maintain integrity to self-love without shame; she was unapologetically herself, African, and a mother to all; and

WHEREAS, Nkechi Ajanaku was bestowed the title Iyalode (Leader of Women) and became an initiated Priestess, Iyanifa (Mother of Secrets) of the Ifa Spiritual tradition during her travels to Nigeria in 2004 and 2006; from before then and up until her death, she was a spiritual

leader, ordained minister, licensed clinical sociologist, and counselor to her family and many in the community; and

WHEREAS, a community leader, Ms. Ajanaku worked on several political campaigns, development proposals, initiatives, advocacy and lobbying efforts in both the Memphis and Knoxville areas, as well as the State and elsewhere throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, she served as executive director of African American Appalachian Arts, Inc., and a private consultant focusing on the organization and developmental needs of grassroots communities; for over forty years, she researched and actively studied ethnicity with a specific emphasis on African culture and societal norms, addressing the building and healing of relationships and communication between diverse ethnic groups; and

WHEREAS, in her role as executive director of African American Appalachian Arts, Inc., she co-produced the development of Haley Heritage Square, a five-year development project of AAAA, Inc., featuring the thirteen-foot statue of the author Alex Palmer Haley; she headed the dedication ceremonies in 1998 and the ten-year anniversary inauguration for that project, and she produced the annual KUUMBA Festival for the past twenty-five years; and

WHEREAS, Nkechi Ajanaku also worked as special events coordinator for Carpetbag Theatre for three years, producing several theatrical productions, concerts, workshops, and seminars throughout this State, as well as in Georgia, Indiana, and Alabama; she wrote and co-wrote nationally and locally funded grants for local organizations in Knoxville, including Project 2000, Inc. and Carpetbag Theatre; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Ajanaku served as Dramaturge for the 2003 University of Tennessee at Knoxville's Clarence Brown Theatre's production of *The Bacchae of Euripides*, the play written by Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian 1986 Nobel Prize Laureate, whom Ms. Ajanaku hosted in Knoxville; and

WHEREAS, an alumna of Leadership Knoxville Class of 2003, Nkechi Ajanaku was also a co-author, along with Femi Ajanaku, of an essay in *Sisterhood: Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, published in 1998; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her first husband and her mother, Nkechi Ajanaku was preceded in death by her grandparents, Abner and Wornie English; aunt, Ruby Wright; and uncle, Elijah English; and

WHEREAS, she will be sorely missed by her children, Bolanile (Abdella) Ajanaku-Habib, Obayana Ajanaku, Takia (Kayode Faniyi) Ajanaku, Tor (Romoke) Ajanaku, Nkosi (Quita) Ajanaku, Adisa (Zakiyah) Ajanaku, and Zola Binta (Jameel) Evans; siblings, Sterling Coney, David (Kim) Coney, Renee Bey Henderson, and Vita Earving; aunts, Wornie English and Jennell English-El; uncle, John (Loretta) English; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, in-laws, and friends; and

WHEREAS, Nkechi Ajanaku's passionate spirit and dedication as a loving mother of four and grandmother of seven was an inspiration to many, as was her commitment to fostering communities and appreciation, love, and understanding throughout the community of Knoxville, the nation, and abroad; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Iyalode Nkechi Kianga Ajanaku, reflecting fondly upon her impeccable character and her stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Ms. Ajanaku.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.